

TO: Energy & Technology Committee Chairmen Arconti and Needleman, and Ranking Members
Rep. Ferraro and Sen. Formica

FROM: Michele Zommer, Secretary, R19 Citizen's Cable Advisory Council, Southbury Representative

DATE: March 7, 2022

RE: Support for SB278 in Public Hearing March 8, 2022

Citizen access to broadcasting in Connecticut is eroding, slowly and deliberately, but in 2022, it appears more and more likely that the institution will collapse without the intervention of the Energy & Technology Committee and the passage of this bill.

In the 1970's and 80's the original lawmakers recognized what was at stake as the State of Connecticut set about putting the construction of the cable TV infrastructure in the hands of private industry. They knew that citizens' constitutional First Amendment right to free speech would be forever compromised without direct and "meaningful" access to the broadcast waves. They put funding obligations on the cable franchises to protect citizen access to broadcasting, enshrined in these original laws.

Today, because of their monopoly control, Charter, Cox and Comcast are some of the richest companies in the world and their top executives, among the richest men. Even though it is a condition of their franchise licenses, over these decades their lawyers have succeeded in chipping away at this institution and stripping our regulators of their authority.

CBIA's attempt to call this proposed bill a "new tax" is disingenuous, in the least, and seems designed to make it a political flashpoint. It is irrelevant that signals enter our homes via a router and a modem instead of a converter box. Yes, transmission technology has evolved from broadband to digital – but that does not and should not erase the original deal these corporations made with the State of Connecticut when we granted their monopolies: fund citizen broadcasting as a means to protect citizens' constitutional speech rights.

The cable wires remain in the public way. Access to broadcasting remains vital for the public interest. And it's within your power to send this bill to the floor and alert your colleagues in the House and Senate of their duty to prevent the collapse of this vital institution.